

BOOK REVIEWS

WESTERN CAPE SANDVELD FLOWERS by Hilda Mason. Text by Enid du Plessis, with pp. 203, 85 illus. Cape Town: Struik, 1972. R10.00.

The idea of producing this book was conceived some four years ago when Enid du Plessis, impressed by Hilda Mason's work as an artist, suggested that she should turn her attention to flower studies. The unique and fast disappearing flowers of the sandveld were in need of someone to record their glories before many of them disappeared forever. This was a challenge and the artist was not slow to take it up.

Not every artist is a good botanical painter but in this book Hilda Mason has shown that she has all the qualities needed. The result is a book that is not only an artistic achievement but is also a useful book for both botanist and layman. A sense of orderliness pervades the whole. As a frontispiece a map of the area is given. This is followed by an interesting account of the early explorers of the sandveld, written mainly by Professor Eric Axelsson, Hilda Mason's husband. A short account of the geological history and vegetation of the sandveld follows. The introduction concludes with some interesting observations made by Wilferd Duckitt of Oudepost, Darling, a man who combines most successfully the role of farmer and veld conservationist. His remarks on the needs of the sandveld will be appreciated by all who have at heart the welfare of this unique flora.

In the main part of the work the order of the plants is that adopted in the Flora of the Cape Peninsula by Adamson and Salter. As one opens the pages the text appears on the left hand side with the illustrations on the right. There are eighty-five plates. In but two cases does a single plant occupy a whole plate. In all the others several plants appear grouped together, well arranged and clearly numbered so that there is never any difficulty in relating the plants depicted to the text on the opposite page. The species are grouped in families, all authentically named by a number of botanical collaborators whose aid is acknowledged at the beginning of the work. Thus we have a book in which orderliness of presentation, authenticity of naming and excellence of illustrations combine to make it a reliable guide to the flora of the sandveld. The notes accompanying each species are commendably short and informative. The derivations of the plant names give an added interest.

Undoubtedly the importance of the work lies in its illustrations which are of high quality. They could only have been done by someone who loved the plants drawn and knew them as they grew. The difficulties encountered must have been enormous for many flowers are as temperamental as a prima donna. The fact that eighteen species of *Oxalis* have been depicted is in itself an achievement for most species of *Oxalis* will remain open only when the light is sufficiently intense, a condition not always compatible with the needs of the artist. Then too Hilda Mason has not confined her attention to the showy members of the flora. Inconspicuous or easily overlooked plants such as *Stoebe nervigera* or *Triglochin bulbosa* are there. The only families which have not received full attention are Gramineae and Cyperaceae. Perhaps this is too much to ask of the artist for even botanists tend to fight shy of these interesting but not very popular families.

This is a book to be treasured by botanist and laymen alike, in fact by anyone who has an interest in the sandveld and its flowers. It may well be that many of the flowers depicted may soon be extinct for the area is fast yielding to agricultural and industrial development. A showy plant such as *Echiostachys spicatus* has not found a place in this book though the much less conspicuous *Echiostachys incanus* is figured on page 163. Clearly Hilda Mason never saw the larger formerly common species with its spectacular woolly heads. Forty years ago it was a characteristic plant of deep sand and could not have been missed.

The printing is clear and reproduction of the plates is outstandingly good. Scattered in the text are small and delightful black and white drawings of scenes in the sandveld. A clear and accurate index concludes this admirable book.

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